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ABSTRACT

Nine questions provide a framework for examining and analyzing how power is used in human relationships and institutions and four questions are presented that show how to begin to apply knowledge about power learning through the previous questioning. To gain an understanding of power, students can analyze various historical situations, institutions, and classroom relationships. Films, texts, novels, personal experiences, simulations, and newspapers contain data on power relationships for examination. Content from the various social science disciplines can be examined by the questions. (SJM)

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POWER

A Questioning Strategy for Analyzing Power Relationships

One important way of analyzing human relationships and institutions is to examine how power is used in those relationships and institutions. Through the repeated analysis of various historical situations, institutions (of family, education, government, war) and classroom relationships, an understanding of power can gradually be developed. In addition, a power analysis of historical events or case studies make them more interesting to students and provide an appreciation of what power is and how it can be used effectively by students.

Following are a series of questions which can be used in analyzing almost any data containing a power relationship.

1. To determine if the data under study is a power relationship or not, we ask whether one person or group is trying to cause another person or group to behave in a particular manner. If so, power is involved.

2. What specific acts are being taken by one party to affect the behavior of another?

3. What is the behavior which one party is trying to cause another party to exhibit?

4. Are there any other individuals or groups interested in or affected by the exercise of power? Specify.

5. What capabilities or resources are the parties using to achieve the desired behavior? (This may include personal skills and abilities, economic capacity, specialized knowledge, political organization, ideology, weapons, etc.)

6. What has been the past power relationship among the parties? What is the anticipated reaction due to this relationship? (i.e., Is there a formal group structure to which both participants belong; e.g., a local government? Is there a strong cultural tradition, such as the father exercising power within the family? Is the relationship transient, in which parties are only slightly known to each other? Are they each sovereign powers in the world?)

7. How is influence exercised? That is, through persuasion, the offering and granting of rewards, threatening or inflicting punishments, the use of violent force, or the withdrawal of allegiance or support.

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8. Was the attempted use of influence successful? How?

9. What effect did the use of power have upon the parties involved? Were they hurt physically, mentally, economically? Was cooperation enhanced, health or well being increased, group loyalty increased? Did the influenced party actually do what it was being asked to do? Did other parties, not initially seen as being involved, become involved?

The above questions are all ones which help to define the power relationship and explain the data available. The data can, of course, come from films, texts, novels, personal experience, simulations, newspapers, and any other convenient source. The wider the range of examples chosen for study, the deeper will be the understanding of the various power relationships possible among people and within various institutions. This analysis can therefore be used to study content from history, anthropology, psychology, political science, sociology and economics.

Beyond these analytical questions, one can begin to apply what is known about power through such questions as the following.

1. What alternate means of influence could have been used in the situation to achieve the same ends?

2. If the power relationship among the participants had been different (specify), how would the outcome have been affected? For example, suppose a power struggle over filling San Francisco Bay were played out under a strong regional government instead of under present conditions -- what would happen?

3. Identify a power relationship problem, determine the desired behavior you would like one of the parties to exhibit, and develop a detailed strategy for obtaining that behavior, outlining the acts, capabilities and influence techniques to be employed. Predict the reactions of the other party or parties and describe the effect on the participants.

4. Describe the type of power relationship you would prefer in a family, your school, your local government, the federal government, or in relations among nations of the world. Develop a strategy for bringing about the desired relationship, taking into account the powers which may be trying to thwart your desires.